

The Tower Ghost

by
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"A tall, majestic figure, in flowing garb and long white beard, stood by the side of the tower, gazing out over the furious sea."



I HAVE written the title of this, my true story, and my eyes have wandered for a moment to the mirror which hangs almost directly in front of me. Strange that I should find myself smiling when but a short while ago I had sat down to my task so full of seriousness and deliberation. Yet so it is. I am smiling, and I can not help myself. Look with me into the mirror, and see whether you can not also find cause for mirth in the incongruity between my appearance and the mighty subject of ghosts. What can a somewhat portly, good-humored, and (my friends say) pleasant-looking woman of little over forty years of age, know about ghosts? There are no troubled lines in my face, no nerveless glitter in my eyes, or look of apprehension lurking about my countenance; I am altogether an unromantic-looking personage, devoid of superstition, lacking in imaginative power, and possessed of a very fair supply of common sense. And yet I alone amongst the living, can tell the

true story of the ghost of Culbone Tower.

To do so I must go back to the days of my earliest childhood. I was born not many miles from Lynton, on the north coast of Devonshire, and I was an only child. Our home was a beautiful one—beautiful, indeed, seems a weak word. The house, perched on a narrow plateau of green turf, literally overhung the sea four hundred feet below, and above us a forest of pine trees stretched away precipitously to the head of the cliff. The only approach to it was by a steep winding path, dangerous after dark, and never safe for strangers, of whom, however, we saw none. The place is now a common resort of tourists; but in the days of my girlhood tourists were scarce, and if one did, by chance, present himself at the lodge gate, old Andrews knew better than to admit him. To have done so would have resulted in his instant dismissal.

From the sea our dwelling place must have seemed perfectly inaccessible.

sible, owing to the steepness of the cliff above, and the sheer descent. Many a time have I seen yachts brought in as near to the rock-strewn coast as the pilot would allow, that their owners or passengers might level their glasses with wonderment at our strangely situated abode. But I fancy that what most excited their wonderment was the curious little tower built on the summit of a huge boulder of bracken-covered rock, which seemed ever threatening to fall upon us and crush our frail tenement like a house of cards. Who built it, and wherefore, no one can tell. There were legends about it, of course, which, at a later period, were raked up and eagerly discussed by a terror-stricken community. But any authentic record as to its builder or its intended purpose was wanting. There it stood, like a Rhenish tower—massive, picturesque, of quaint foreign architecture, and, at the time when I best remember it, an object of ceaseless dread and terror to every member of our little household. Between it and the house yawned a cleftlike chasm, into the bottom of which, at high tide, the sea came curling. At one time, before my recollection, there had been a hand-bridge across; and my father would often go and smoke there, and even persuade such of his friends that were sure-footed and free from dizziness to accompany him. But that was many years before I reached girlhood, and I never thought of it, or heard it mentioned, save with bated breath and shuddering awe.

Well had it earned its evil reputation, for it had been the scene of the terrible tragedy which cast a deep gloom over my early life. My father had been one of three sons, who had lived with their widowed mother at a place called Munster Castle, on the borders of Exmoor, some ten miles inland. Of these three sons my father, Frank Catherall, had been the eldest. Next to him came Francis, and the

name of the youngest was Cecil. Like many other mothers, Mrs. Catherall leaned most to her youngest son, and failed altogether in concealing her preference. All three were strangely alike in disposition—stern, and reserved, with hot, fierce tempers, but generous withal, and passionately devoted to their mother. My father married first and came to live at Glencoombe, where I was born. My mother never got on very well with old Mrs. Catherall, but there was no actual unpleasantness, and I have faint recollections of some very early visits to Munster Castle. She, on her part, never returned these visits, but invariably excused herself on account of the peculiar situation of our house—an excuse against which we could urge nothing, for certainly the descent to it was by no means pleasant for anyone unaccustomed to the cliffs. Both my uncles were frequent visitors, however, and were welcomed warmly whenever they came. All three brothers seemed to be the closest of friends, and spent most of their time fishing, or shooting, or hunting together. They were popular in the neighborhood, and were generally supposed to be as they appeared—on the best of terms.

ONE November afternoon—how well I remember it!—they had all three gone out shooting over Dunkery Beacon. I was sitting at the window, wondering how long it would be before they returned, when suddenly the door opened, and my father entered the room. Directly I saw him I knew that something terrible had happened. His face, usually ruddy and sunburnt, was ghastly pale, and he tottered rather than walked into the room.

I was curled up on the floor reading, but I sprang up at once and ran over to him. I cried out to know what had happened.

“Don’t ask me,” he answered in a

fearfully hollow voice; "don't ask me." He took me in his arms and kissed me a great number of times, and when he put me down, he said "Good-bye."

I asked him where he was going, but before he could answer, my mother, who had heard him in the hall, came down to know why he had returned so soon, and alone. He answered her never a word, but simply kissed her as he had been doing me, until she got frightened and began to cling to him and cry. Then he turned his head away with a great sob, and rushed out of the room without another word.

I tried to follow, but he had locked the door. I heard him talking for a few minutes with Perkins outside, and then he hurried out of the house. My mother was ringing the bell violently; but though the servants came to the door at once they could not get us out, for my father had taken the key with him in his pocket.

While they were trying some other keys, I remembered the side window, and running to it, jumped out upon the lawn. What I saw made me sink dumb and helpless to the ground. The cry which I tried to force out froze upon my lips, and my limbs refused their office. On the other side of the chasm, standing on a part of the smooth boulder where I had often heard him say that he would not trust himself for a thousand pounds, was my father, holding in his hand the little hand-bridge by which he had crossed, and which he seemed to have caught up, to prevent Perkins from following him. While I watched him he flung the frail piece of carpentry down into the chasm, and from side to side I heard it rumble and bump until, with a sickening crash, it reached the bottom, and struck against the jagged edge of a rock, when in half a dozen rapid strides my father reached the other side of the boulder, and it flashed upon me that he meant

to cast himself into the sea. For a moment he straightened himself, and I saw his powerful, massive form standing out as it were against the sky, when throwing his arms over his head with a wild despairing gesture, he crouched down for the spring. I fell on my face faint and trembling; when I looked up again, roused by a horrified shout from Perkins, he was gone.

After that I lost all consciousness, and for weeks I lay between life and death. When I slowly regained my senses, I found the one subject which I was burning, yet dreading, to hear about was denied me. No one would talk to me at all about my father. No one would tell me why he had done that fearful deed. To mention the tower before any of the servants was sufficient to send them trembling from the room. My mother would faint if I even tried to talk about my unhappy father, and Perkins strenuously refused to come near me for fear of being questioned.

As I grew stronger, I began to think it strange that neither of my uncles ever came to see us in our great sorrow. When I mentioned this to my mother, she was seized with a great trembling, and bade me never to mention them again. I had made up my mind, however, to be kept in ignorance no longer, and I was persistent. I would know everything. If they refused to tell me, I would run away to Castle Munster and find out from my grandmother, or from the servants there. I was so insistent that my mother at last gave way, and, leaning back in her chair amidst frequent storms of sobs and tears, she told me all that had happened.

I listened hungrily, standing back in a far corner of the solemnly darkened room, and with my eyes riveted upon the thick folds of crape which hung about my mother's frail form, I heard now that scarcely an hour after my father had cast himself from the

summit of Culbone Tower news came that my uncle Francis had been picked up from amongst the rocks below Bossington headland, dead, and with unmistakable marks of violence about his throat. An inquest was held upon the body, and an old shepherd, who had been ascending the hill from Allercombe, deposed, with great reluctance, that he had seen, far away from him, the figures of two men struggling together on the verge of the cliff, and that one had cast the other over. Then my Uncle Cecil had been called upon, and in a low tone he told his tale. They had all three been shooting together, he said, and were returning by the cliffs. There had been a slight unpleasantness between his two brothers during the early part of the day, and it suddenly blazed out again into a fierce quarrel as they stood on Bossington headland, prepared to descend into Porlock. He himself had been a little way behind at the time of the crisis, adjusting the strap of his gaiter, and just as he was straightening himself and preparing to move forward the calamity had occurred. He could tell them no more, he said; nor could he, for, strong man though he was, he suddenly reeled against the table and was carried from the room in a dead faint. There was a profound sensation amongst the little body of sympathizing men; but though the coroner pronounced the verdict in a broken voice and with tears in his eyes, it was the only one which they dared give, and it was:

"Wilful murder against Frank Catherall."

My first impulse, on hearing this awful story, was to disbelieve it. But then I remembered the fiery temper of all the Catheralls, which had led many of them in days gone by to commit deeds as rash, if not so sinful. And I thought of my father's wild appearance when he had burst in upon us, and of his mad climb up to

Culbone Tower and its fearful sequel. Then, too, I remembered my Uncle Cecil's reluctant evidence, and my heart sank. The web of testimony was too closely woven. My father had died a murderer—had cast himself into eternity with the curse of Cain upon his head.

SLOWLY the months dragged by at our lonely home, and, as winter drew on, a fresh terror crept in upon us. In the middle of the night strange sounds often came from the dreary tower which loomed almost over our heads, and with the whistling of the November wind came cries and moans which seemed to us, listening in awe and trembling, like the outpourings of an anguished spirit. Others heard them besides ourselves, and strange tales reached us of a tall, majestic figure, in flowing garb and long white beard, which, whenever a storm was raging, could be seen standing by the side of the tower, gazing out over the furious sea. Such tales as these spread, and one by one our servants left us.

At first I was incredulous; but one afternoon at dusk, when the wild west wind was roaring down the coombs, and the sheets of rain were rolling over the cliffs in curling clouds, I crept on my hands and knees along our tiny strip of lawn, and, soaked through and through, and dreading every moment lest I should be blown over the cliffs, I crouched down with my eyes fixed upon the tower. Then I, too, saw it.

A chill, more icy than the driving rain or the cold earth could give, passed my shuddering frame as I saw suddenly emerge from the tower the tall figure which I had known and loved so well. With swift, even footsteps he seemed to pass without effort up the slippery, almost perpendicular rock, where I knew that no mortal footsteps could tread without slipping and falling backward amongst the

wet bespangled heather—there, in the same place that I had seen him pause between earth and sky, he stood still for a moment.

"Father!" I cried; "father!" But the rushing wind driving in my face refused to carry the sound and bore it back over my head. For a moment I closed my eyes, and when I opened them again the figure was gone. Then I knew that I had seen my dead father's spirit.

For a while I dared not look upon the scene of this terrible apparition, and when I told my mother what I had seen, she, too, was overwhelmed with fear, for she was by nature nervous, although I was not. One afternoon, however, not many weeks afterward, I summoned up my courage and walked almost to the edge of the chasm, gazing steadily up at the frowning tower above me. There was no sign of life there, mortal or ghostly, and gradually I felt my fears subside.

I was just turning away with a sigh of relief, when I heard the shuffle of footsteps, and found Perkins at my side. He looked at me narrowly, almost suspiciously, for a moment.

"What be't doing here, Miss Lizzie?" he asked, peering up at me from underneath his shaggy eyebrows. "Dost want to see t' poor master's ghost? You'll no see it in fine weather. He'll only come to us in a storm."

I shuddered.

"You have seen it, then?" I exclaimed eagerly. "Perkins, why does he come? It is awful!"

The old man turned round upon me, his voice in trembling anger.

"Why do 'e come, Miss Lizzie? Ay, you may well ask that. How do 'e think a poor spirit can rest in its dark watery grave when it's been so sorely wronged? I tell 'e this," he continued, hoarsely, holding his withered arm out toward the sea with a dramatic, almost majestic gesture, "nev-

er'll his spirit rest quiet, never'll the waves give up his body for decent burial, till Master Cecil Catherall take back his lying words, and the whole world knows as my poor dear master was no murderer. I tell 'e that, Miss Lizzie; I tell 'e that!"

He shuffled away, leaving me almost paralyzed by his strange words. Latterly we had come to look upon Perkins as weak in the head, and he spent all his time rambling about the place, no one knew where; but his words were spoken with such intense earnestness that they made a strange impression on me. All day long I was restless and uneasy, but in the morning I had come to a decision. I would go and see my Uncle Cecil.

The next morning, before anyone was astir, I started on my solitary expedition, leaving word only that I had gone for a long walk. Since the day of that terrible tragedy, we had had no message from either my grandmother or my uncle, and I felt not a little nervous at the idea of presenting myself before stern old Mrs. Catherall, who disliked my mother, and had never taken much notice of me. But for my age I had a wonderful amount of resolution, and I never shrank from my self-imposed task.

THE road to Munster Castle lay across a great stretch of moorland, radiant with a purple glory and with gleaming yellow gorse in the summer, but barren and desolate-looking on that chill November morning. White clouds of mist came rolling down from the hills, at times soaking me through, and often I had to wade through the swollen streams which flowed across the rough track. Still I held on, though at times there came gusts of wind which carried me nearly off my feet, and though the path grew no better than the bed of a mountain torrent. At times a solitary sign-post standing out against the gray sky or the black hills cheered me on my way;

but not a human being did I meet till, after five hours of walking, the dreary towers of Munster Castle rose up before me. How my heart throbbed then!

I forgot how faint and weary I was as I entered the great courtyard and timidly rang the bell. No one answered the summons; so, as the door was open, I walked inside and sat down upon one of the carved oak chairs. Presently a tall, grave-looking servant came across the hall, and started back in amazement at the sight of me. I rose and explained my presence.

"You'll not be able to see Mr. Cecil, miss," he said, staring at me as if I were a wild creature. "He only came home from abroad yesterday; that is to say, he was brought home ill. I'll tell Mrs. Catherall, though, if you'll be pleased to take a seat. She's with him now."

He moved away, and opened a door on the opposite side of the hall. I watched my opportunity and followed him noiselessly through two great rooms into a smaller one, on the threshold of which he paused and said something to its inmates in a subdued tone. Before he had finished I had slipped past him and had entered the apartment.

In an invalid's chair, nearly smothered with magnificent furs, and drawn up before a blazing fire, lay my Uncle Cecil. His face was thin and haggard, and his great brown eyes seemed burning with a fierce but weary light. By his side stood my grandmother, majestic and handsome as ever, with her gray hair coiled in many plaits about her head, and an angry light gleaming in her still bright eyes.

"Child, how dared you come here?" she said in a low tone full of intense, vibrating anger. "Who are you?"

Before I could answer, my Uncle

Cecil had sprung up from his couch with a quick, startled exclamation.

"My God!" he cried; "it is his child! It is Frank's child! What does she want?"

I moved toward him, quivering with excitement and striving to steady my voice.

"Uncle Cecil," I cried, "I have come to you because my father's ghost is crying out night and day from Culbone Tower, and Perkins says that it will never be quiet until you speak. I want to know all about the day when Uncle Francis was killed."

Such a cry as mortal lips seldom uttered burst from my grandmother's trembling lips. Uncle Cecil was shaking all over like a man stricken with a deadly ague. I gazed from one to the other; frightened, bewildered, yet not one whit disposed to withdraw my question.

"Child," she exclaimed in a tone tremulous with passion, "why have you come here with this mad story about your father's ghost? What can your uncle know about that miserable day that he has not already declared? Go home at once; or, stay, I will send someone home with you," and she stretched out her hand toward the bell.

He stopped her quietly, but firmly. There was a new look in his face which I liked little to look upon, although it gave me hope.

"Mother," he said calmly, "the time has come to speak. I will not die with this sin upon my conscience. Child! Lizzie! Your father was no murderer. It was I who threw Francis over the cliff."

I looked at him, and thought that I must be dreaming. With a great sob of agony my grandmother had thrown her arms around his neck, and was imploring him to be silent.

"He is raving," she said to me excitedly. "Take no notice of him; he is raving. Cecil, my darling, what

good can this do? Be silent; oh, be silent, for my sake!"

"Mother, I can not," he faltered. "God have mercy upon me, I can not! Lizzie, ring the bell!"

Mechanically I obeyed him. He asked a question of the servant who appeared, which was answered in the affirmative. A minute or two later a clergyman was shown into the room.

"Mr. Greyson," said my Uncle Cecil, stretching out his hand imploringly to where my grandmother knelt on the floor beside him, "I want you to listen to a few words from me. I am going to tell you the truth about my brother Francis' death."

A deep groan from the prostrate figure by his side, and my uncle passed his hand across his forehead as if the task was almost beyond his strength.

"On that afternoon," he continued hoarsely, "Francis had spoken bitter but just words to me about a matter in which I was much to blame. While we waited on Bossington Hill for Frank, who was some distance behind, he recurred to the subject, and told me what steps he had decided to take in it. I called him an impertinent meddler, and struck him. We closed together, and in the struggle I threw my brother over the cliff. Frank came up just in time to witness the awful deed. For some minutes we could neither of us speak. Then, trembling with horror and fear, I stammered out a few wild words.

"'Cecil,' he cried, with his hands upon my shoulders, 'God help you! I am the only one who saw this. I will die sooner than give evidence against you, remember that. Get home, now, and say it was an accident.'

"He rushed away from me, and before I reached home I heard of his death. Then the shepherd came to me who had seen the struggle, and I was at my wits' end. Frank had died to save me. Should I let his sacrifice be

in vain, or should I tell a lie which could hurt his memory only? I told the lie, and it has killed me; it has eaten the life away within me. I am a dying man, Mr. Greyson; and with the knowledge that in a day or two I shall stand before my God, I swear that this is the truth. I implore you to fetch a magistrate."

THEY took but little notice of me; and when Mr. Greyson left them, I slipped out, and, heedless of the wind and rain, started homeward. Across the bleak, desolate moor I sped, reveling in the wild blasts which swept down the mountain's side upon me, for I knew that the storm was increasing, and he would be there to-night.

I reached home; but, avoiding the house, I stepped out on the tiny strip of lawn, and, holding tightly on the iron railing, crept along toward the chasm. When I reached it, I could see nothing but the sea below, curling and hissing, sweeping in with a long hungry roar, and dashing its foaming spray far up the side of the cliff. Above me the fast-moving leaden clouds seemed descending almost within reach, and a hurricane was raging amongst the thickly-grown pine trees, whistling with a fierce mirth amongst their slender tops, shaking together with a harsh grating the cones, and bending them down like blades of grass. I crouched in a corner, waiting in awe till the fierce revelry of the elements should subside a little, and straining my eyes through the darkness to catch sight of the tower which loomed directly in front of me. Suddenly I heard a voice close to my side.

"Miss Lizzie, what in God's name are you doing here?"

I peered out into the darkness and recognized the dim outline of Perkins' bent form.

"Perkins," I cried, "I have been to

Castle Munster, and seen Uncle Cecil. It was he who killed his brother. He is dying; and he has confessed."

He seized me by the shoulders, with a strange light in his bleared eyes. "Be you lying? Tell me, quick!"

"It is true," I cried, frightened by his vehemence. "The ghost will trouble us no longer."

"The Lord be praised!" he muttered. "God! wha't that?"

Two young pine trees, torn up by their roots, were whirled across the lawn close to us, and, smashing through the iron palisading as if it had been rotten timber, disappeared over the edge of the cliff.

The old man fell on his knees, and prayed for a minute or two. Then he stood on to the remnant of the railing.

"I seen many a storm in my life," he muttered, "but ne'er such a one as this. God grant the tower may stand! Miss Lizzie, ye're a brave child. Dare 'e follow me?"

I nodded. The wind would have mocked at my efforts at speech had I attempted it.

"Come, then!" He moved slowly forward to the very verge of the chasm, dragging something behind him. I followed on hands and knees.

He paused and threw a rough plank across to the boulder on which the tower stood. He stepped carefully across, and presently I heard his voice from the other side.

"I ha' made it fast, Miss Lizzie. Dare 'e come?"

I crept to the edge and looked down with a shudder at the black yawning chasm.

"Shall I see the ghost, Perkins?" I cried.

"Ay, ay," he answered. "See!" And he half roused himself from the bracken among which he had been crouching, and pointed with a long trembling finger toward the tower. To my amazement there was a feeble

light burning in the topmost chamber.

"I will come, Perkins," I cried. "Wait for me."

I knelt down, clinging to a shrub until there was a momentary lull in the gusts which came tearing and roaring down the coomb. Then I sprang up, and, holding my breath, hurried across the frail little bridge. The moment I was in safety we commenced the ascent to the tower, but we had got little more than half-way up when another burst of wind and rain came around the corner of the coomb, and we had to sink down amongst the wet bracken and dig our fingers into the very earth to save ourselves from being carried away and swept over the edge of the cliff. There we lay, cowed and shuddering, for what seemed to me an interminable while, listening to the wild melancholy shrieking of the wind amongst the pine trees, and the loud angry roaring of the furious sea below. At last it seemed to abate a little, and almost on our hands and knees we crept up to the door of the tower. My heart was beating with a fierce excitement, increased by all that I had gone through during that wonderful day, and I seemed to have a distinct consciousness that something extraordinary was going to happen.

Perkins pushed open the door with his foot, and we tumbled together into the narrow chamber. A tall figure sprang from the other end of the place toward us, and at first I shrank away in an agony of fear; but then I heard my name in well-remembered accents, and saw a familiar pair of arms stretched out toward me, and my fear died away. "Father," I cried, "father!" and with one bound I threw myself into the passionate embrace of the ghost of Culbone Tower.

THAT same night, after my tale had been told, my father abandoned his self-imposed exile, and returned

with me to Glencoombe. On the morrow news reached us of my Uncle Cecil's death; but his confession had been signed and witnessed, and my father found himself a hero.

For a while we continued to live at Glencoombe. But so constant was the stream of visitors who came to gaze upon the haunted tower, and over the edge of the rock on to the shelflike

plateau which had served as a hiding place, that to escape them we moved to Munster Castle, which, since the death of Mrs. Catherall—she had not long survived her favorite son—had become my father's property. And there I lived until my name was no longer Catherall, and someone took me away to another part of the country.
